

House Republican Press Release

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House Republican Leader Ward Says State Should Test H.S. Athletes for Steroids



HARTFORD – Some high school athletes would undergo random steroid testing under a proposal by House Republican Leader Rep. Robert M. Ward.

Ward said there is evidence that an increasing number of high school athletes are using dangerous substances to gain unfair advantages on Connecticut's playing fields.

The testing could be put in place within a year once guidelines are developed by school and athletic officials. Ward said he was not overly concerned about legal challenges because courts have ruled that schools have the right to drug test.

"It is in the best interests of our young student-athletes to increase the scope of testing for substance abuse and root out harmful and dangerous behavior at the high school level," said Ward of North Branford. "It is time to act to ensure that our young athletes are not jeopardizing their own health in hopes of illegally gaining advantages on their competition."

Ward said legislation will be offered this session to pay for the testing out of the current projected \$492 million 2004-05 fiscal year surplus. He said \$200,000 could pay for about 2,000 random tests. "Compared to the potential long-term health risks, that's not a lot of money," he said.

Ward said that the departments of Education and Health would be the state agencies responsible overseeing the program, but the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference would play a defining role in designing and administering the specifics of the testing regimens. Ward noted that his office has been in discussions with CIAC officials.

The Republican said that the recent arrest of a half dozen Hand High School students in Madison for possession and sale of illegal steroids did not prompt his action. The issue has been simmering for sometime and was highlighted nationally by the sensational headlines generated by the Major League Baseball steroid scandal.

“This is a common sense approach to a problem that, to date, few have wanted to take on directly at the high school level,” Ward said. “Education about steroids is not enough. We must insist on accountability in this area.”

A national survey of the Mayo Clinic in 1999 indicated that between 5 and 11 percent of male teen athletes had tried steroids, prescription drugs that can halt bone growth and damage internal organs.

Another study from the National Institute on Drug Abuse showed an increase in steroid use among teen athletes and a corresponding decrease in the perceived harm.

The NCAA spends \$4 million each year on testing for its 360,000 athletes. It would be prohibitive to put in place mandatory testing for all high schools, he said, so the CIAC will be relied upon to come up with sensible guidelines.

“What we know is that testing works. It will also provide a much clearer view on how widespread the problem is. Right now, we have to rely on anecdotal evidence,” he said.